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ABSTRACT

This paper offers reflections on personal beliefs and practices used to construct and communicate knowledge about social studies teaching and learning with preservice elementary teachers. The paper draws upon one person's personal experiences, student journals, student interviews, course documents, field notes, and audio tapes of an instructor. The paper focuses as much on the process of the inquiry as it does on the findings of the inquiry. Specific incidents from a teacher's teaching are described to illustrate four beliefs and practices about knowledge generation: (1) given or received knowledge to apply directly to teaching and learning; (2) multiple knowledge balanced according to context and purpose; (3) constructed knowledge drawn from experience; and (4) knowledge as problematic or uncertain. These findings are discussed considering the development of reflection in university teacher educators and the implications for preservice teachers. A 29-item list of references is included. (DB)

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CONSTRUCTING AND COMMUNICATING KNOWLEDGE:

A PERSONAL JOURNEY

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CONSTRUCTING AND COMMUNICATING KNOWLEDGE: A PERSONAL JOURNEY

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ABSTRACT: I am engaged in self-reflective inquiry about my beliefs and practices in constructing and communicating knowledge about social studies teaching and learning with preservice elementary teachers. Sources of data for this qualitative study include autobiography, students' journal writing, interviews with students, course documents, field notes and audio tapes of my instruction.

By sharing the process of my inquiry and making it as much a focus of the paper as the inquiry itself, I narrate the personal discovery, transformation, and contradiction that occurred, events that may frequently happen in academia but are seldom examined. Critical teaching incidents are described to illuminate four beliefs and practices about knowledge generation: (1) given or received knowledge to apply directly to teaching and learning, (2) multiple knowledge that is balanced according to context and purpose, (3) constructed knowledge drawn from experience, (4) knowledge as problematic or uncertain. These findings are discussed in light of the development of reflection in university teacher educators and implications for preservice teachers.

CONSTRUCTING AND COMMUNICATING KNOWLEDGE: A PERSONAL JOURNEY

"What do teachers teach? Subject matter? Students? Themselves?"

Since becoming a university teacher educator 14 years ago, my career has taken a number of unanticipated turns. I entered the field with the expectation that my priorities were well matched with those of the major state university where I worked: researching, publishing, and teaching. Trained in experimental and quasi-experimental research methods. I embarked on a series of studies investigating the effects of one or another curricular intervention on student learning and published my findings in nationally recognized journals. Though the focus of my research was a problematic area, that of gender and equity in the curriculum, my research was conducted unproblematically, the method of positivistic science a given and not itself a subject of inquiry.

Seeds of transformation had been planted earlier in my life as a feminist, activist, and lover of the arts and humanities. Yet these seeds had not grown to fruition partially because of the dominance of psychological models of prediction and control in mainstream academia and partly because of unexplored experiences of self. Discovery of new ways of constructing and communicating knowledge began in a conscious way at a presentation I attended by Robert Coles, renowned psychiatrist and chronicler of children's "stories." He told his tale of frustration with psychological approaches in treating disturbed children and of the successful alternatives he pursued by talking to children about what they

1. *I extend my appreciation to Nancy Dana and Karla Kelsay, who commented on earlier drafts of this paper*

knew and the things that seemed important to them. His capacity for dialogue, empathy, and taking the perspective of others became a vehicle for their understanding and growth.

Feminist research on teaching and learning has given further impetus to my transformation. Ironically, even though I was well read in feminist pedagogy and feminist theory from the 1970s to the present and had incorporated many elements in my teaching and research, I had not made the connection sufficiently to examine my own dependence on positivist science, pedagogy, and theory until recent years. The groundbreaking Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1985) was invaluable for me in framing new understandings of how knowledge can be constructed and communicated. From interviews with women from diverse educational backgrounds, Belenky and others found five major categories of knowing, including knowledge received from experts, subjective knowledge drawn from personal experience, objective knowledge derived from a set of procedures, and constructed knowledge, For the first time I was willing to attribute legitimacy to personal experience and constructed knowledge not only for directly feminist concerns but also in the broader context of academic research and writing.

Becoming a Qualitative Researcher

Many others have guided me to new understandings from our interactions or through their writings as qualitative researchers and teacher researchers. For example, several years ago some colleagues at Florida

State and I engaged in a collaborative inquiry to look at what conceptions of elementary education four university faculty members teaching the same introductory course bring to instruction, their planning processes and reflection prior to teaching, and their thinking and decision-making during the act of teaching. Building on qualitative research done by one of the group (Kelsay, 1988) and others on reflective practice and teacher thinking (Clark, 1988; Grimmett & Erickson, 1988; Schon, 1983), our study resulted in a new understanding of the diverse ways teacher educators in the department construct and communicate knowledge (Scott, Kelsay, Nelson, & Thomas, 1989). Many other CUFA members, including most of the presenters at this symposium, have contributed papers at annual meetings that have helped fire and keep alive my interest in reflective teaching by teacher educators. Susan Adler's papers (1988, 1990) and review of social studies teacher education research (1991) gave me added confidence I was heading in a useful direction.

The seeds of discovery were further nourished in 1990 by a semester living abroad and working in London area primary schools where education starts with the needs, abilities, and interests of the children rather than a set of objectives to master. For four months, removed from a familiar environment, I was able to experience another way of being, another way of seeing. The excitement of my own learning restored, I realized I had a lot more I wanted to learn and was uncomfortable in the role of the university "expert." However, returning to campus and confronting academic values and university expectations reminded me that it was a lot easier to think from a phenomenological perspective than to act from one. Reentry meant traveling a rough and rocky road though cushioned by the realization that,

as a qualitative researcher, I could also inquire about the transformation taking place.

The past academic year (1990-91) has been a period of investigation with my students and myself as teachers and learners. I undertook an action research project to become more reflective of my teaching practice with preservice teachers in a required course I have taught for over a decade on social studies in the elementary school. My intent was to investigate my beliefs and practices in constructing and communicating knowledge about social studies teaching and learning. Questions that guided the inquiry were questions I thought I had found answers for long ago and had communicated in my classes and co-authored textbook (Woolever & Scott, 1988): "What does it mean to learn social studies? What does it mean to teach social studies? What is social studies knowledge? How do we find truth?"

Now, however, not only were these basic questions problematic but so were the methods used to search for the answers. Although I was convinced that empirical methods would not be useful to examine such phenomena, the possibilities with qualitative research could be likened to opening "Pandora's Box." How valid and scientific is action research on my own teaching and learning? Can one explore biography (student experiences) and autobiography (my experience) and contribute to science? Can all human experience be a part of human science? Where does experience end and social science begin? Where do I stand in the paradigm revolution? What theoretical lens should I look through to make sense of new data and to communicate to other researchers? Now that the universe has

been opened, how far will be paradigm revolution take us? Isn't all experience shaped by our own biases as humans? Are any of these questions meaningful to my students?

Fortunately I did not have to know answers to all these questions. One aspect of my action research was to ask questions that would shape my teaching and encourage students to pose their own (Lather, 1986; Ruddick & Hopkins, 1985; van Manen, 1990). Together we would investigate possible answers to questions about learning, teaching, and social studies. I had read widely in the field of qualitative research, served on doctoral committees with knowledgeable colleagues, directed doctoral students using qualitative methods, but had yet to transfer this knowledge into my own research practices.

Sources of data included journal writing by students and myself, field notes and audio tapes of instruction, course syllabi and other documents distributed to students, observations and interviews with students. Explaining to the class what my study was about, I taped a number of class sessions, required students to keep a journal of their responses to the class and outside readings, and interviewed a sample of students at the end of the course and a semester later at the end of student teaching.

The undergraduate elementary social studies education course I teach is one of four pedagogical content courses including math, science, and reading taken simultaneously by students their senior year, integrated through an extensive, combined field experience, and followed by a semester of student teaching. During the past few years the curriculum for Elementary Education majors has been revised and strengthened with an

emphasis on teacher beliefs and reflection throughout a four-semester sequence of courses. With a phased-in program of state-approved limited enrollments, faculty select each incoming class and we are now beginning to see some impact of the revised curriculum. Majors are also required to take a number of credit hours in the social sciences, physical and biological science, and humanities prior to admission and then two semesters of core courses focused on children and teaching in multicultural schools, foundations, and other pedagogical content areas (language, literature, art, music, physical education).

Searching for Authenticity

On many occasions since last spring, I have reflected on what to write in this paper, what content, what organization, what voice. The data generated from the study had generated more questions than answers. Any given the possibilities for writing this paper from a qualitative perspective, new inquiry began. How could I construct and communicate knowledge to a community of peers? A dialogue with you, my audience, ensued. How could I juxtapose the voice of authority expected at a professional meeting with a voice of authenticity?

Of course I should include a solid foundation in theory and cite the major theorists who may have discovered long ago what I discovered or written about it in illustrative, compelling terms. And, what theories should ground my study? Social construction, critical theory, developmental, and feminist theory all come to bear.

But, how essential are these theories? Suppose they serve more as bricks in a wall of scholarship erected to maintain the separation of

theory from practice, what is known from the knower? Or contribute to a wall of scholarship to protect my authoritative role as expert, a prop to let you know what I really do know what I am talking about? Or, even a wall of scholarship to hide behind, to keep my real self and human frailties safe from further scrutiny or criticism by you or myself? If these purposes exist and disembodied theory results, then perhaps I have a responsibility not to couch my inquiry primarily in theoretical terms.

Well, what would happen if I abandoned theoretical "crutches" and just stuck with the story? After all, narrative approaches to research are gaining credibility and there is a growing literature on its many varieties (Witherell & Noddings, 1991). I could cite Connelly and Clandinin (1988, 1990) with their textbook, Teachers As Curriculum Planners: Narratives of Experience and refer to Richard Butt and his colleagues (1990) on research as autobiographical praxis. Or I could call to your attention the work on teacher lore (Schubert, 1988) or quote from one of Madeleine Grumet's (1988) elegant essays on women and teaching.

I have resisted the urge to report in detail what other theorists, researchers, and practitioners have written about that would be pertinent to this self-reflective inquiry. And writing a polished aesthetic narrative that pulls together the many threads of this inquiry seems beyond my capabilities, at least for now. What guides this investigation and my attempt to capture it in words are the discoveries, transformation, and contradictions as I have experiences them as a learner from direct experience first, educator and theorist second. I am willing to take the risk of shedding my voice of author-

ity to find a voice of authenticity.

Although there is a growing body of literature by elementary and secondary teachers as reflective practitioners, I have found only a few self-reflective portraits written by professors (Elbow, 1986; Macrorie, 1984; Shea, 1987; Wineburg, 1991; the journal, Teaching Education) and several collaborative writings of interest (Berman, Hultgren, Lee, Rivkin & Roderick, 1991; Sears & Marshall, 1990). Nor have many university professors of education incorporated action research in examining their own teaching (e.g., Cornett, 1990). As I write this personal journey, I find that I have to shed my old habits of academic writing, find language new to me, and communicate in a way that reflects how I constructed the knowledge contained as well as its meaning. This process has required much more germination, patience, and persistence than I ever could have anticipated.

For this paper I examined some of the ways I construct and communicate knowledge in my preservice elementary education course in an effort to understand what it means to learn social studies, teach social studies, and generate social studies knowledge. These "ways of knowing" are described in four clusters: (1) knowledge as given and received, (2) multiple knowledges (3) knowledge as socially constructed, and (4) knowledge as problematic or uncertain. Derived from epistomological frameworks proposed by others (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Kurfiss, 1988; Perry, 1970), these clusters also suggest a developmental sequence experienced by both learners and teachers necessary but not sufficient for the development of reflective thinking (Ferguson, 1990; Floyd & Scott, in press; King, Kitchener & Wood, 1985; Kurfiss, 1988).

Constructing and Communicating Knowledge

I planned for the course with an intention to change my approach to teaching and learning in significant ways. I wanted to teach less about social studies teaching and learning and do more experiencing of social studies in ways that would be meaningful to my students and myself. In previous years, I had emphasized to preservice teachers the variety of instructional approaches available to enhance learning, and I frequently taught using demonstration lessons with examples drawn from content highlighting multicultural perspectives from as many disciplines as possible. I depicted the task of the social studies elementary teacher to orchestrate the variety of strategies with content and activities appropriate for their students. Although the preservice teachers had engaged reasonably successfully in the teaching processes, I never sensed they had gained a sufficient grasp of how social science knowledge and values come to be constructed and how both the process of construction and the knowledge itself could be meaningful to themselves as well as to children. My intention was to create a meaningful context in which students would experience the process of generating social studies knowledge and teaching approaches by in-depth questioning and researching on a topic as a group.

Knowledge as given or received. When I stepped back and examined the varieties of data generated, knowledge I had constructed and transmitted as an expert and expected to be received as truth by my preservice teachers emerged as a dominant pattern in the course. Like most instructors, each semester I prepare a syllabus that conveys my plans for the course and the expectations I hold for my students. According to uni-

versity guidelines, the professor's syllabus serves as an agreement that obligates both the teacher and students who enroll in the course. My objectives, required readings, assignment, and grading policies were to be determined by the beginning of the course.

Prior to the beginning of the semester, I had reflected on a wide range of new ideas for the course and written page after page of notes of possibilities. As the semester approached, practical realities took precedence -- too many ideas and too little time to implement one social science integrated "theme" unit for the entire semester. As I projected a weekly calendar of course topics and readings. I settled on five mini-themes to pull together content I wished to emphasize throughout the course: culture, diversity, community, democracy, and change. I had already modified by ideal of spending the semester "doing" social studies and fell back on certain topics and activities familiar too me.

Despite my intention was to show students how they can play a primary role in constructing and communicating knowledge, much of the course content and many of the student activities remained as a given from me, the expert--what the students needed and what I could provide to insure a strong foundation for them in both the content and processes of social studies.

Multiple knowledges A second theme in my data was constructing and communicating knowledge in a multiplicity of ways to examine social studies teaching, learning, and content. At times my students and I engaged in activities to reflect that truth can be determined from more than one perspective, depending on context and purpose.

In my syllabus, I included a new statement of my beliefs about learning and teaching (see Appendix), I introduced the notion that learning and teaching have multiple dimensions and that knowledge generation is problematic. Even though I fell short in fully implementing these principles, by putting them in writing and discussing them with students during the semester, I was one step closer to bridging theory and practice. An illustration:

> Most of us come to expect that teachers have the "answers" and students are to be fed information so they will know the answers, also. This kind of teaching and learning may be what is most comfortable for you as well as for me. But it is not the kind of learning that will be best to prepare us for becoming reflective teachers or to motivate students who may be bored.... Students of all ages need to be given encouragement to think, take responsibility for their own learning, and make their own decisions.
>
> Learning about people, learning social studies is a life long experience. There are few "right" answers in social science. The more we learn, the more we recognize multiple ways of knowing. Knowledge is not static, but is invented and reinvented by individuals, individuals who are part of a community. My view of knowledge is only one view, an informed view shaped by many experiences, but no more or less important that what you will learn from this course. (See 4113 syllabus, Spring, 1991).

One way students got involved in understanding multiple knowledge was through experiencing an investigation of the recent Mideast War. Students' concerns about the Mideast situation permeated the class throughout spring semester. With Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the heavy involvement of the United States in the Mideast by early January, the daily unfolding of events became a topic of inquiry. A classroom set of newspapers provided at a reduced cost by the local publisher became a regular

feature of the course. By teaching a lesson incorporating a strategy for student decision-making and social action, an advanced organizer I usually introduce early in the course and one that is developed throughout our textbook, I could guide students through the process using content relevant to the current situation.

Our class met Tuesday, January 15, 1991, President Bush's deadline for withdrawal by Iraq. I had gathered source materials from newsmagazines, newspapers, and books to convey relevant knowledge from each of the social science disciplines: history, anthropology, economics, sociology, political science, geography, and psychology. Wherever possible I included diverging or multiple perspectives to make students more aware of the complexity of the issues.

First the preservice teachers brainstormed a list of questions they had about the situation and then with my direction identified a focusing questions, "What should I/we do about the Iraq invasion?" The 30 students worked in seven groups with each group examining data drawn from one of the social sciences of humanities. They were asked to search for relevant knowledge for any of the questions generated, the focusing question, or as new information. After sharing findings from each group as a class, we discussed value questions, developed alternatives for action, briefly evaluated them, and decided on a plan for action. Through this process, students were exposed to "multiple knowledges" depicting conflicting perspectives about a world event of high interest and concern Later in the semester I repeated the processes of knowledge inquiry and value inquiry employing multiple perspectives about less controversial content.

Another way we examined knowledge from multiple perspectives was by an analysis of a class survey of individual learning styles. Students completed a questionnaire that resulted in a profile depicting their relative preferences among four modes of learning: mastery, understanding, involvement, or synthesis. Through this analysis, students could see how different approaches to learning could be valid for each individual as well as the existence of patterns among the groups.

Knowledge as socially constructed. Much of the data gathered from the preservice teachers' journals and interviews showed their efforts to communicate knowledge constructed from their experience in the course or interacting with teachers and children in their field placements. I encouraged students to construct their own understandings of social studies learning and teaching through individual journals and small group dialogue. My own journal was an opportunity to respond reflectively to the class. I frequently asked class members about their perceptions of how people learn, teach, and understand social studies. Sharing the rationale behind this inquiry and the value of student perspectives was a way I conveyed the process of constructing knowledge.

I continued in a direction I had introduced the previous semester developing the classroom as a cohesive community. My students took all of their classes together and had been grouped by program faculty to reflect a mixture of students pulled from previously intact groups. On the first day of class students from each of the three previous sections had a few minutes to prepare a skit to introduce its member to the others. I designed learning teams to facilitate students' interactions in multiple "family" groups for in-

class assignments and field assignments. A jigsaw cooperative learning experience provided further development of students' confidence in their own abilities to construct and communicate knowledge to others. Given that the most comfortable learning style for the majority of students was through involvement, my goal was that each preservice teacher would also see the others as individuals who could work together toward common ends and as resources for constructing and communicating knowledge of teaching and learning social studies.

Students were encouraged to volunteer for one of a number of class committees to engage in such activities as promoting student welfare, writing a class history, composing a class song and poem, and planning a class reunion. Many volunteered and communicated their own knowledge through these community building opportunities. Strong support for a graduation banquet resulted in a student-initiated project that will come to fruition this December.

Many of the teaching strategies I demonstrated in class required student involvement that generated constructed knowledge. For example, an inductive strategy for teaching a concept based on Hilda taba's work engaged students in constructing concepts. One guest speaker from the Geography Alliance helped students examine their spatial knowledge of the earth through visual imagery and group discussion. At the time students were preparing instructional units to teach with elementary students, our class took a field trip to the Florida Museum of History for an in-depth examination of primary resources available, some of which students later incorporated in their lessons.

Knowledge as problematic and uncertain. The notion of uncertainty in social studies knowledge is contradictory to most preservice teachers' experiences of learning in schools. An understanding that there may be no "right" answers or that moral dilemmas are an inherent part of most human experience develops slowly, if at all, among undergraduate students. For professors, the reality of partial knowledge and unsolvableconflicts is often resisted as we seek to "know" our fields of study.

As suggested earlier, this way of knowing played a central role in my constructing and communicating knowledge for this inquiry and resulting paper. However, very little evidence of engaging students in this process appeared in my study. Even though a significant portion of the course was spent dealing with values in the classroom, for the most part I "de-problemized" value inquiry to show my preservice teachers a rational way to deal with values and teaching value inquiry skills. Although a number of chapters dealt directly with value questions, readings from my co-authored textbook failed to deal with the larger context and irony of teaching democracy and social justice in an undemocratic and socially unjust world.

One significant departure from the "normal" proceedings of the course occurred because we were citizens in a country at war. The involvement of the United States in Kuwait and the charged response from students and myself resulted in a closer examination of human knowledge as problematic and uncertain. Although often more engaged with the personal consequences of the Persian Gulf War than the larger United States' policy issues, many students reported more interest in world events

than they had ever experienced before. As a result of our inquiry about "what should we do about the Iraq invasion?" the class had decided as a group to send letters and pictures to soldiers in Saudi Arabia. They received moving responses.

During almost every class period students shared newsclippings, information or observations about world, national, state and local events stemming from the Persian Gulf uncertainties. They were perplexed that only a few of the elementary teachers they were working with involved children in an examination of these events and shocked that some teachers would shut off discussion initiated by their students. In these ways our social studies course became a living classroom where problematic knowledge was not only constructed and communicated but also became the impetus for action outside the classroom.

Building Bridges to Reflective Practice

If there is value in teacher educators becoming reflective of their own social studies knowledge, the ways they come to know knowledge, and ways to construct knowledge with their students, what have I learned from this study? It is my intention to link my understanding of the diverse ways of knowing to its impact on my reflective practice and to suggest that parallel relationships can be drawn for other teacher educators, preservice and inservice teachers.

When teacher educators or preservice teachers view knowledge as given or received, they are unlikely to question its veracity and instead focus their attention on mastery, often through memorization. Although at times it may be wise to take the knowledge of an expert as the basis for

understanding or action, this study made me more aware of ways expert knowledge is embedded in curricular expectations for both students and professors. Preservice teachers hunger for techniques that will make them successful instructors and managers of children. Teacher educators are exhorted to prepare preservice teachers who can understand and practice effective teaching or display the knowledge base of teaching (ATE, 1990). At this level of epistemology, teacher educators dwell on how "knowledge base" deemed most appropriate for each course in the most efficient way. Preservice students become consumers of the expertise provided.

When teacher educators and preservice students are able to examine multiple perspective, including their own philosophy and practices, reflective practice may emerge. The willingness to weigh competing views according to context and purpose requires an epistemological shift. When engaged in constructing knowledge from experience with others, reflective practice can be enhanced by the dialogue, debate, collaborative practice than may ensure. One way I became more aware of the approach to knowing was through an omission on my part. Although I had frequently talked with students about this inquiry, I had not had an in-depth conversation or an ongoing collaboration with any of my peers during this inquiry. When I was ready to make sense of my data, I struggled before contacting several colleagues. Through dialogue and sharing of drafts of this paper, I extended my reflective thinking.

When knowledge itself is viewed as problematic and uncertain, social studies teacher educators and preservice students may realize that more and better knowledge is not sufficient to teaching and learning social

studies. Underneath the construction and communication of knowledge lies societal value issues whether implicit or explicit. Only by making explicit value-driven societal influences and ideological aspects of social science are we able to move to a higher level of reflection, decision-making, and action. One valuable insight from my reflective inquiry and an area for future growth comes from a better grasp of my desire to make explicit with students the problematic nature of underlying societal values and ideologies that influence social studies education and schooling so that I can engage students in more direct action in responding to these dilemmas.

This self-reflective inquiry continues to generate as many questions as answers, suggesting more "circles within circles" waiting for exploration (Ely, 1991). Given that I have already exceeded both the agreed upon and my self-imposed deadline to complete this paper, I must stop with a sense of incompleteness. Otherwise I would go back to earlier sections of the paper and reframe them in light of other contexts. For example, much of the narrative describing the four "ways of knowing" is presented matter-of-factly without telling how it was generated or selected. Or I would describe more of my process of a qualitative researcher challenged by the task I set to collect data and interpret meaning but inevitably fell short in the press of competing priorities and the enormity of the task.

By sharing the process of my inquiry and making it as much a focus of inquiry as the inquiry itself, I have attempted to illuminate the personal discovery, transformation, and contradictions experienced in my constructing and communicating knowledge as well as implications for reflective practice. I am interested in continuing this dialogue with other social studies educators to reconsider how we learn, teach, and understand social studies as a community of learners.

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